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Dual Roles of O'Malley's Running Mate Raise Questions

By John Wagner
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When Del. Anthony G. Brown stepped to the microphone this week at an event highlighting endorsements of Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley's gubernatorial bid, Brown had little to say about his Democratic running mate.

Instead, the Prince George's County delegate unleashed a broadside against Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., declaring that the Republican had "failed all of Maryland's families" and that "his style has been divisive and downright mean-spirited."

The event underscored what O'Malley gained when he decided to announce Brown's selection in December, well before any Maryland gubernatorial candidate has ever chosen a running mate. The mayor not only added an attack dog to his ticket early on, but he also expanded his campaign's reach into a community critical to his success in the September primary.

His Democratic rival, Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan, has not named a running mate, and Ehrlich is not expected to announce his choice before the General Assembly session ends in April.

Meanwhile, Brown has been popping up at Democratic clubs, community gatherings and other meetings to tout his ticket, often in Prince George's, where more Democrats reside than in any other Maryland jurisdiction. O'Malley has credited Brown with helping open doors in his home county, and in some cases he appears to have helped nail down endorsements.

At Monday's event, for instance, Del. Joanne C. Benson (D-Prince George's) lavished far more praise on her legislative colleague than on O'Malley, sharing that she still displays a "Welcome Back from Iraq" sign on her lawn from the summer, when Brown returned from a tour of duty as an Army reservist. "I told Anthony Brown that if he decided to run for anything, I'm going to support him," she said to reporters.

Although Brown's selection won near-universal praise from Democrats, the timing of the pick has created some awkward moments during the 90-day legislative session and has opened up Brown, the House majority whip, to questions about whose agenda he is championing.

"I've been very clear with the campaign that campaign scheduling has to be done around my scheduling in Annapolis," Brown said in an interview. "These are obligations that I cannot overlook."

On a recent afternoon, Brown sat with fellow members of the Judiciary Committee to hear testimony about several bills related to sexual offenders.

Testifying before him was Michael E. Busch, the House speaker who handpicked Brown for the majority whip slot, pushing a bill backed by the Democratic leadership. Then came O'Malley, who backs a Baltimore delegation bill calling for more widespread use of ankle bracelets to monitor those on parole.

Asked afterward whether he felt any obligation to champion the O'Malley-backed bill, Brown said, "Absolutely none."

O'Malley paused for a moment when asked the same question and then said he expects any bill that the panel passes ultimately would include components from both pieces of legislation.

Later, Brown appeared in his home county before the Greater Laurel-Beltsville Democratic Club, where he was introduced as "Delegate Brown and candidate Brown."

Brown's address mixed personal biography, promotion of O'Malley's record in Baltimore and bashing of Ehrlich's record as governor -- along with some humor.

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IQ QUESTION:
Which does not belong in the group?

U₁ S₁ O₁

E₁ A₁

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Brown pointed to failed efforts to legalize slot-machine gambling as an example of Ehrlich's inability to get legislation through the General Assembly and his unwillingness to compromise.

"I don't know where you stand on slots, and I'm not here to talk pro or con," Brown said. "I was so afraid of the issue, I had to go to Iraq."

Although the line brought laughter, it also exposed an issue on which Brown and O'Malley have differed -- and that Duncan has sought to exploit.

O'Malley supports a limited number of slots at racetracks. Brown has worked in Annapolis against the gambling expansion. The running mates have squared their differences by saying neither wants to impose slots on any community that does not want them.

"Since Martin O'Malley won't debate Doug, maybe he and Delegate Brown can debate each other," Duncan spokeswoman Jody Couser said.

Duncan aides have also sought to drive a wedge between O'Malley and Brown on another hot-button issue: legislation calling for a statewide crime audit.

The bill, strongly backed by Duncan, was drafted in response to questions about the validity of crime-reduction numbers in Baltimore. O'Malley calls the reduction his biggest accomplishment and has said he does not believe an audit is necessary.

Last week, Brown joined one of O'Malley's deputy mayors in calling the timing of the bill "politically suspect." But Brown left open the possibility of supporting the measure, which will first be heard by the Judiciary Committee, on which he sits.

Some of Brown's colleagues say they are surprised that he has not faced more conflicts.

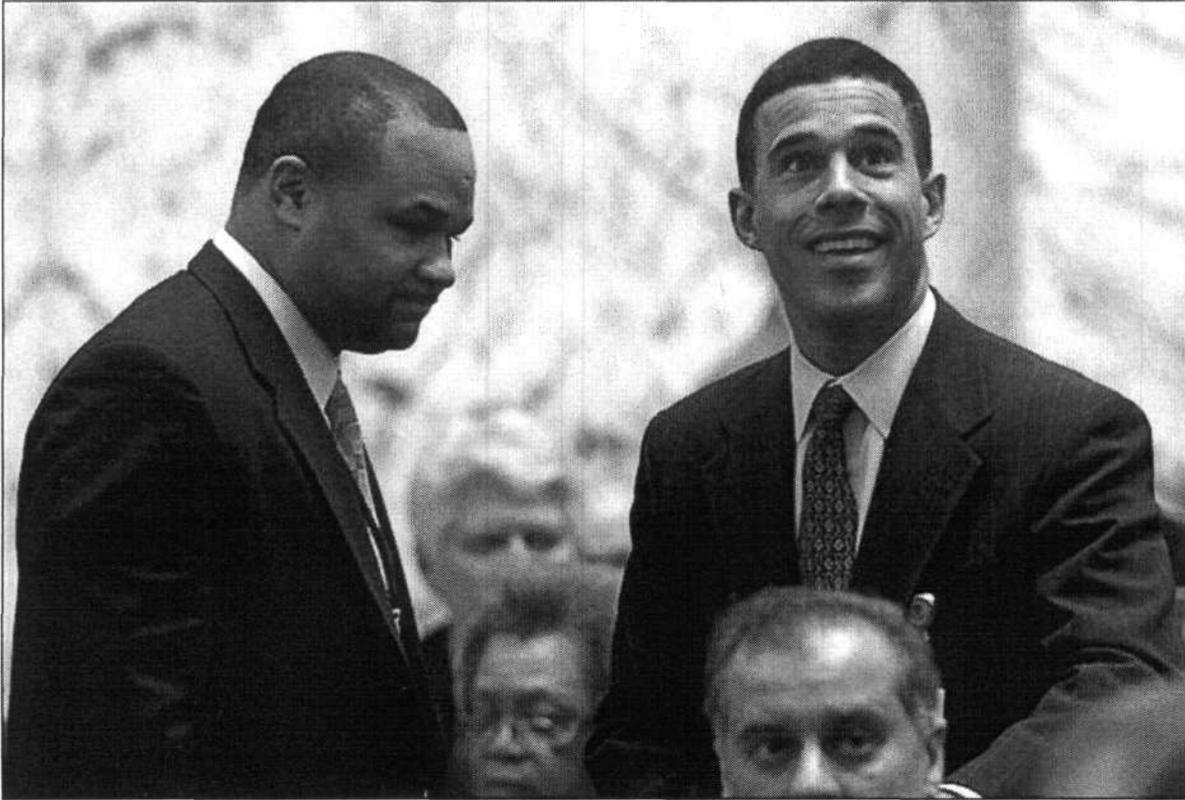
"So far, it's worked out pretty well, but it's additional pressure on Anthony that I'm surprised he wants to deal with," said Del. Richard S. Madaleno Jr. (D-Montgomery), a Duncan supporter who has questioned whether Brown should continue to serve as whip. "My concern is this places a lingering doubt about his motivations."

Brown's decision to run with O'Malley means that this will be his first and only session in Annapolis as majority whip. He was appointed to the post by Busch (D-Anne Arundel) in 2004 but was deployed to Iraq a few months later and missed last year's session. Brown is vacating his House seat after this year to run for lieutenant governor.

He said he feels fine about his limited tenure, noting that many of the tasks he was given while active in the Army were limited to a year. The goal was always to leave an office in better shape than he found it, and that is what he is trying to do here, Brown said.

"He's doing a good job," said Del. Brian R. Moe (D-Prince George's), the chief deputy majority whip and a Duncan supporter. "I don't think there's any question what his job is while he's here."

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Anthony Brown of Prince George's is vacating his seat after this year.

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